



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: April 1 to June 30, 2005

**BAHRAIN: POLITICAL PARTY BUILDING (04855)
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-00004-00**

**Project dates: February 1, 2004 and July 1, 2005¹
Total budget: \$400,000.00 Expenses to date: \$400,000.00**

I. SUMMARY

Two years after municipal and legislative elections afforded Bahraini citizens the opportunity to participate in a more open and democratic system of governance for the first time in almost three decades, the balance between democratic reforms, political capacity and public confidence in government remains uncertain. The government of Bahrain continues to implement measured democratic reforms while clamping down on human rights activists and free speech advocates. Political societies wrangle with each other and the government in negotiations about the laws to govern political activity. Bahraini citizens increasingly feel alienated from the formal political process.

As political societies are afforded greater legal status and a more significant role in Bahrain's transition, it is important that they be capable of acting as effective advocates of viable policy alternatives, especially prior to the 2006 elections. Public confidence in the democratic process will depend largely on the ability of political societies to fulfill this role and be active in the political process. In order to encourage a political environment conducive to this development and help political organizations reach this goal, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) is implementing a program that seeks to meet the following objective:

- *To help political societies develop the capacity to organize and increase their abilities to engage in constructive dialogue with each other and with the government to improve the environment in which the 2006 elections will take place.*

To meet this objective, NDI undertook the following activities during the last three months:

- Held regular meetings with MPs, members of the *Shura* Council and political society leaders to encourage continued dialogue and consultation on issues of national importance;

¹ NDI's cost extension proposal was submitted and is awaiting approval.

- Inaugurated Political Organization Leaders Summit to encourage the leadership of political organizations to hold regular periodic meetings to enhance communication and coordination;
- Held a forum with the Bahrain Transparency Society (BTS) to initiate dialogue on electoral reforms between political societies and the government;
- Conducted an assessment of political societies to determine their capacity and development needs;
- Held a roundtable discussion on Article 92/A of the Bahrain constitution;
- Held a roundtable discussion on the membership and powers of the *Shura* council; and
- Sent Bahraini parliamentarians to a forum on transparency and accountability in Yemen to share strategies for improving governance with their colleagues in Yemen and Kuwait.

NDI's program is focused on strengthening the capacity of political societies to organize, think strategically and effectively represent citizens' interests so that they may more positively impact the decision-making process. The Institute's activities in the last quarter aimed at preparing the ground for the 2006 elections by improving the political framework and institutional environment in which societies will compete and campaign.

II. BACKGROUND

With elections roughly one year away, the debate over the continuation of the election boycott, as well as the increased positive dialogue both among the opposition and between the opposition and the government, indicate Bahrain has reached an important moment in its democratic development. This moment urges those entities promoting democracy to increase efforts in Bahrain, providing more support and advice to those interested in reform.

Trends in Bahraini Political Societies

Bahrain's political societies reflect the general uneven development of political life in the country. Although democratic political institutions barely exist in Bahrain, in some respects, Bahraini political societies, when looked at in a comparative context, have some very concrete strengths. However, they also have some very glaring weaknesses which are only partially attributable to the overall state of democracy in Bahrain.

Although there are a handful of very prominent political leaders who play a large role in their party, particularly among the opposition, Bahraini political societies are not dominated by one leader to the extent they are in many places. The parties generally have a notion of their role as being larger than simply serving the ambitions of one politician. Party leaders in Bahrain, while wielding a fair amount of power, are elected by general assemblies, serve on an eleven or twelve member board and enjoy support based more on the goals of their party than on the loyalty they engender through their charisma or personal style. Sheikh Ali of *Al Wefaq*, is something of an exception, but he is probably not even the most important or popular cleric in his own party.

Political societies in Bahrain tend to have a reasonably strong organizational structure and foundation for internal democracy, largely due to the civil society law under which these

societies operate. This law mandates that each society have an eleven or twelve member board, elected by its general assembly. In addition, societies all have a similar committee structure. These committees seem to play an important role in some societies while they are more of a formality in others. Some societies even have regional and municipal level organizational structures which are particularly striking in a country as small as Bahrain, where sub-national organization is less necessary than in larger countries.

All of the societies share a focus on democracy issues. With the exception of the National Charter Action Society (NCAS), every society speaks to the importance of constitutional reform. The societies, particularly opposition societies, will need to find a way to translate the goal of democratic reform into something which is more tangible to voters and to differentiate among themselves. Although the democracy issues seem to obscure all others for the political class, whether the averaged Bahraini voter feels the same way remains ambiguous.

It is not surprising, given their relative lack of experience with elections, that many Bahraini political societies do not have election skills. Only one society has tried anything like direct voter contact. Many people say that power over the electorate lies firmly with the religious leaders, most of whom are loyal to *Al Wefaq*. However, several societies such as the Progressive Democratic Tribune (PDT) and the National Democratic Action Society (NDAS) are interested in enhancing their campaign skills; *Al Wefaq* remains somewhat disdainful of the whole election process.

A lack of understanding of political strategy is also a critical characteristic of Bahraini political societies. In general, they are weak in strategic thinking, strategic communication and campaign strategy. The 2002 boycott of elections is a good example. When boycotting societies are asked about the strategy underlying the boycott, they speak of the issues around the boycott rather than the boycott's impact on achieving their goals for those issues. Other than saying that their voters expected a boycott, no strategic explanation is given.

Although most of the societies have spoken about the need for more democracy in Bahrain, the overall commitment to democracy among the opposition is unclear, particularly the more religious societies. It is important not to conflate the justness of their cause, particularly those societies that represent the disempowered *Shia* majority, with their commitment to democracy. For this reason, deepening of democratic values and expanding belief in democratic processes and institutions is necessary across the Bahraini political spectrum.

Broader Political Challenges

In order for democracy to emerge in Bahrain, it will need to overcome several obstacles. The first, and perhaps most obvious obstacle, will be the demonstrated unwillingness of the ruling family and the broader Sunni elite to reallocate power equally. Clearly, a reallocation of power would quickly lead to a reallocation of wealth and jobs, which is probably more of a concern to Bahrain's elite.

Additionally, there are several less apparent obstacles. First, while there is a demand for more political and economic equality by the *Shia* majority, there does not appear to be a

demonstrated demand for democracy. Moreover, while the leaders of the *Shia* societies speak of the import of democracy, it is often explained as a means to an end - that of more power for the *Shia* majority and their own religious agenda. Democracy can be a means to an end, but the means themselves are, of course, the real crux of democracy. Similarly, the election boycott itself does not evince a weak commitment to democratic institutions by the *Shia* leaders, but their lack of interest in elections and parliament is more disturbing.

A related point is that the vision of democracy differs substantially within the opposition. The smaller more liberal parties have a much more tolerant, secular image of democracy, whereas the larger Islamist parties believe in an Islamic democracy with an increased role for the Islamic clergy and Islamic law. Clearly, these two visions will come into conflict if democracy advances in Bahrain. It is equally clear that the latter vision will be most likely to be dominant.

An additional factor which needs to be confronted is that of expectations. While economic conditions are declining in Bahrain, the frustration on the part of the people is influenced by their own expectations. Some villages comparatively referred to as being “just like Bangladesh”, are certainly poor with bad living conditions, but are not impoverished in a way that is remotely comparable to many other countries. However, the bitterness in the comments can be heard in from statements like “people should not be living like this in an oil producing country”.

Bahrainis, as is probably natural, compare themselves to their richer gulf neighbors rather than to other poorer countries in the region, creating broader discrepancy between expectation and reality. This discrepancy is exacerbated by the government’s desire to project Bahrain as an oil rich country. The issue of foreign workers is also part of this expectation problem. It is not clear whether, as some say, poor *Shia* would not do the low paying jobs currently done by workers from other countries, or, as others say, many *Shia* want to kick the workers out of Bahrain. It goes without saying, in the case of Bahrain that the foreign workers are the people with the fewest rights and wealth in Bahrain.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Meetings and consultations

NDI continued to hold regular meetings with MPs, members of the *Shura* Council and political society leaders to encourage continued dialogue and consultation on issues of national importance. These consultations are aimed at resolving the current political impasse in the country and providing strategies to address future conflicts. NDI continues to see slow, but positive, progress in the abilities of political societies to engage in constructive dialogue with each other and with the government. Evidence of this progress is illustrated in the ongoing workshops and roundtable discussions that enable political societies to reach negotiated agreements on recommendations and strategies for approaching government on electoral reform issues.

Political Organization Leaders Summit

On April 12, NDI convened the first Political Organization Leaders Summit in collaboration with the National Charter Action Society (NCAS). This roundtable discussion was the second in a series of NDI public policy dialogues inaugurated in March. Although NDI has brought together political society leadership many times before, this meeting was the first time senior political organization leaders attended a meeting exclusively addressing inter-society issues. Les Campbell, NDI Senior Associate and Middle East and North Africa Regional Director, opened the summit with a question and answer session on comparative regional transitions to democracy.

The roundtable, which included the participation of 55 senior leaders representing 13 political organizations, sought to encourage the leadership of these organizations to hold regular periodic meetings to enhance communication and coordination. This objective was echoed by the chairman Fahad Al-Shehabi, NCAS board member, who stated that “as a result of the recent political tensions and ongoing debate between the government and the political parties, we have gathered here with the hope of resolving these tensions and unifying our political policies.”

Each society presented its position on current affairs and its vision for Bahraini political discourse. Mr. Ahmed Juma, president of NCAS, emphasized that the country must have political and national unity and that the various societies should come together, setting aside differences, to improve the state of democracy in Bahrain. In his opinion, the best way to forward their goals is to form a common office for the political societies to voice their opinions and solve differences, keeping the national charter as a reference. Leaders of NDAS, the Brotherhood Society, Islamic Shura society, and Islamic Action Society agreed with the idea of establishing a consultative body to engage in dialogue among the political societies. Other societies, while not specifically voicing support for the establishment of a new entity, supported continued communication and discussion with their counterparts.

The political societies voiced many issues that they feel are critical for moving forward the process of democratization in Bahrain. Protection of citizen’s political, civic, and social rights; reforming the judiciary; addressing unemployment; educating citizens as to the rights and responsibilities of a democracy were all raised as priorities.

The roundtable marked the first-time senior political society leaders met to express their societies’ political positions on issues of national importance. Their coming together and listening to each other is an achievement in itself. As an even greater outcome, however, the leaders agreed to continue dialogue meetings and, at the conclusion of the roundtable, had established a steering committee that would prepare for a national conference.

Forum on Recommendations for Election Reform

NDI and the BTS conducted a forum with political societies on the recommendations for electoral reform developed after the October 2002 legislative elections. The forum examined the recommendations presented in the BTS report that followed the elections; identified recommendations for electoral reform that may be negotiated with the government prior to the

2006 municipal and legislative elections; developed skills in conveying the importance of these issues to democracy and negotiating the terms under which they might be pursued; and formulated a strategic agenda for initiating dialogue on recommended reforms with government officials. Approximately 95 representatives of political societies, civil society organizations, the media, the Ministry of Information, the Directorate of Statistics, and the *Shura* and *Nuwab* Councils attended the forum. The participation of the Ministry of Information and Directorate of Statistics marked the first time the government has participated in a forum on election law reform.

The roundtable discussion included a heavy emphasis on the establishment of constituency boundaries for legislative constituencies, particularly the public process necessary to ensure confidence of the electorate in mapping results. The discussion also emphasized different models for election administrations. The national election commission model, prevalent in countries without a long tradition of democratic elections or a pluralist political system, was discussed in some detail.

The roundtable discussion also included a presentation by Jessie Pilgrim, NDI consultant on electoral law and reform, concerning general international guidelines for a legal framework for elections. Two themes were emphasized throughout this presentation and reinforced during the discussions. The first was that the legal framework, especially the regulation of constituency boundaries, must ensure that the expression of the will of voters is conducted on the basis of equal suffrage in order to achieve a legislature representative of the country's main political forces. Secondly, the law and its implementation must be public, transparent, and open to foster the electorate's confidence in the fairness and legitimacy of election results. Additionally, the roundtable included brief discussions on the following topics: structure of the legal framework; the roles of political societies and candidates; equality in campaign conditions; access to media; campaign finance and expenditures; and observers.

The recommendations from the 2002 election report of the BTS were discussed in great detail in small group discussions, the conclusions of which were shared by the groups in a plenary session. After these reports, there was additional discussion on the recommendations, including comments from Jessie Pilgrim concerning comparative international practices and specific problems related to the recommendations based on examples from other countries. After the roundtable, it was clear that political society leaders understood the recommendations.

There was no absolute consensus as to all recommendations that should be negotiated prior to the 2006 municipal and legislative elections. However, there did appear to be consensus that the following recommendation areas must be negotiated prior to the elections:

- delineating constituency boundaries in a public process that is fair and limits political influences;
- election administration, particularly consideration of establishing a national electoral authority that is inclusive, pluralistic, and represents the views of all political forces;
- limitations on campaign expenditures, reporting requirements, and regulation of funds from charitable organizations;
- fair access to media and impartiality in media coverage;
- observer access to all election processes; and

- candidacy and voting rights of military and security personnel.

At the conclusion of the roundtable discussion, there was a consensus that the political society leaders should reformulate the recommendations and formally present them to government officials. Basic strategies for a formal strategic agenda were discussed and shared by political society leaders.

Follow-on meetings were held with various members of political societies. These meetings included further discussions of the roundtable topics and strategies for negotiation that might be used to seek electoral reform.

Assessment of Political Societies

In April and May, NDI political party expert Lincoln Mitchell conducted an assessment of Bahrain's political societies to determine their current political and organizational capacity and to identify areas of development that could strengthen opportunities for participation in the 2006 elections. The assessment consisted of discussions with society members, in-depth interviews, and observations. The National Islamic Forum (NIF) declined to be formally interviewed but engaged in informal discussions with Mr. Mitchell; all other political societies actively participated in the assessment process.

Issues raised with the political societies included their vision for political change in Bahrain. Overwhelmingly, the societies prefer a constitutional monarchy similar to those found in Europe to either a liberal regime, which allows more freedoms but in which the king still rules and dominates the executive branch, or a more radical transition toward a government without a monarch.

Political society leaders demonstrated understanding of the importance of strategic thinking, political party building and conducting routine periodic organizational and programmatic assessments and evaluations. Further, political society leaders and membership demonstrated knowledge of the differences between political parties and civil societies: political parties participate in governance, have programs and an agenda for governance and compete in elections; civil societies or interest groups concentrate their efforts on single issues, such as social justice, the environment, women's rights, but do not compete in elections or seek to govern.

Roundtable on Article 92/A of the Constitution

On April 21, NDI organized a roundtable discussion on Article 92/A of the Bahrain constitution in collaboration with the Progressive Democratic Tribune (PDT). Seventy-five representatives of political societies, civil society organizations, the *Shura* and *Nuwab* Councils, and the media participated in the roundtable with the goal of analyzing the implications of the article on legislative authority and developing strategies for improving the legislative review processes. Although some boycotting societies did participate in the roundtable discussion, *Al Wefaq* declined. The society did, however, raise the subject of Article 92/A at its weekly forum on April 24.

Article 92/A is perhaps the most discussed article of the constitution amongst the *Shura* and *Nuwab* Councils, the media and civil society due to its implications on legislative authority. Although cabinet ministers are excluded from membership in the national assembly, the cabinet has interpreted Article 92/A as giving it the power to draft all legislation that emanates from the Parliament. Members of Parliament cannot debate any proposed legislation without a formal draft bill; however, the cabinet has kept proposed legislation from the *Nuwab* or *Shura* councils for periods exceeding 18 months, thereby limiting legislative debate and effectively stalling the legislative process. The role of the cabinet in drafting legislation has raised concerns within Bahrain that the executive branch dominates the legislative branch, negating the principle of separation of powers.

“Fifteen members of the Consultative Council or the Chamber of Deputies are entitled to request proposing an amendment to the Constitution. Any member of the two chambers is entitled to propose laws. Each proposal shall be referred to the relevant committee in the chamber in which the proposal was made for an opinion. If the chamber sees fit to accept the proposal, it shall refer it to the Government to formulate it as a draft amendment of the Constitution or as a draft law and present it to the Chamber of Deputies during the same or succeeding period.”

Article 92/A of the constitution

This roundtable sought to address this debate on legislative drafting authority. Participants were asked to answer the following questions:

- What is the meaning of the word “government” in Article 92/A?
- Who should have the legislative drafting responsibilities?
- What is the meaning of the terms “draft or formulate” in Article 92/A?
- What is the possibility of establishing a timeframe for legislative drafting?

Speakers from PDT, NDAS, and a member from the *Shura* Council and the *Nuwab* Council each gave a 10-15 minute presentation on their views of Article 92/A based on these questions. Subsequently, the representatives of 12 political societies, BTS, Bahrain Lawyers Society, Bahrain Human Rights Society, and other *Shura* and *Nuwab* Council members provided five-minute comments, followed by a second round of two-minute comments.

Dr. Hassan Madan, president of PDT, opened the discussion by stating that the main goal of the debate on Article 92/A is to demonstrate the restrictions the article places on legislators and its role in negating the premise of separation of powers among the three branches of government. Removing legislative drafting authority from the Parliament shifts the balance in favor of the executive branch. The first deputy chairman of the *Nuwab* Abdulhadi Marhoon concurred that Article 92/A inhibits the legislature and added that the government had misused, misinterpreted and abused the provision of the Constitution. He recommended that in the long-term the article be amended to insure the authority of the Parliament over legislative drafting; however, he was concerned in the short-term with alleviating the delays that exist in the drafting

process as it stands. To address this problem, he proposed establishing an independent Directorate of Legal Affairs (the directorate is currently under the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs) that would draft proposed legislation referred to it by the *Nuwab* or *Shura* Councils under a specified deadline and draft proposed legislation and regulatory directives referred to it by the cabinet. Other speakers agreed that legislative authority needs to reside firmly in the hands of Parliament, but disagreed whether constitutional amendments or the establishment of an independent drafting body were the preferred solution. Participants additionally identified the lack of communication and cooperation between the executive and Parliament as an impediment to the legislative process, though the vice chairman of the Bahrain Lawyer's Society expressed strong disagreement with the premise that the government should have any role in drafting legislation.

Roundtable on the Membership and Authority of the Shura Council

In collaboration with the National Islamic Forum, NCAS, and the *Al Wasat Al Arab* Islamic Democratic Society, NDI conducted a roundtable discussion on the membership and

"The provisions of part 4 Chapter 2 of the constitution on the legislature shall be amended to be consistent with democratic and constitutional developments worldwide in so far as the introduction of bicameral system is concerned. This would mean that one chamber is constituted through free, direct elections whose mandate will be to enact laws while a second one would have people with experience and expertise who would give advice as necessary."

Bahrain National Charter

authority of the *Shura* Council. Seventy-five representatives of political organizations, civil society, the *Shura* and *Nuwab* Council, and the media participated in the roundtable to engage in serious debate and dialogue to reconcile differences between the common understanding of the function of *Shura* councils and the intent of the National Charter.

Dr. Hashim Al Bash, vice president of NCAS and a member of the *Shura* Council, opened the discussion with an explanation of the literal meaning of *Shura*, which is a group of advisors. In his opinion, the role of the *Shura* Council is to give advice to the lower house of Parliament, i.e. the *Nuwab*, whose members have the right to accept or reject that advice. The chairman of *Al Wesat* added that he believed the *Shura* Council should serve as an intermediary between the executive and the legislature, but that the *Shura* Council should not hold primary legislative power and should not be allowed to overrule the *Nuwab*. He recommended constitutional amendments to modify and clarify the role of the *Shura*. Others echoed the need for a balance of powers between the *Shura* and *Nuwab* Councils, emphasizing that the *Shura* should be consultative in nature while the *Nuwab* serve as the legislating council. One participant even suggested that the *Shura* be abolished.

Regarding the composition of the *Shura* Council, participants proposed that members have at least 40 years of age and hold university degrees. In addition, some participants recommended that all or some proportion of the members of the *Shura* be elected indirectly,

while others offered that the number of *Shura* members should be reduced and additional seats allocated to the *Nuwab*.

Participation in Forum on Transparency and Accountability in Yemen

Bahraini parliamentarians, in addition to their Yemeni and Kuwait counterparts, participated in a good governance forum on Transparency and Accountability June 21-23 in Yemen. The day prior to the forum, the Bahraini and Kuwaiti delegations had informal meetings with the Yemen Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) and General People's Congress (GPC) to discuss the common ground the parliamentarians have as Arabs and the common issues and challenges they face in improving governance in their respective countries. The collaboration of the diverse parties of the JMP served as a strong example for the Bahrainis, one of whom expressed his amazement at seeing the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) at the same table with *Islah*.

The first portion of the official forum focused on executive oversight. Remarks by Bahraini and Kuwaiti participants were primarily positive and focused on the theoretical aspects of accountability and transparency: in both countries parliamentarians are officially allowed to question and investigate ministers, though practice differs from what MPs are legally permitted to do. One of the Bahrainis highlighted this gap in law and practice, stressing the limits it places on parliamentary effectiveness and opened the floor for candid discussion. Participants from each of the countries then presented papers on good practices in governance. The Bahraini paper spoke more to the legal provisions for transparency and accountability, rather than the actualities of parliamentary action. During the discussion period after the presentations, one Bahraini emphasized the need for personal responsibility on the part of parliamentarians, stating that it was up to MPs to start using the tools they have to exercise oversight.



The workshop concluded with a statement prepared and signed by the participants (Appendix 1), declaring that the forum formed the foundation of cooperation among the three

parliaments and the participants are committed to raising the issue of transparency and accountability wherever and whenever they are able.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Result 1: Political Societies demonstrated initial steps in preparing for municipal and legislative elections in 2006

Indicators:

- Political society leaders discussed and evaluated recommendations for electoral reform from BTS based upon the 2002 elections; and
- They are drafting a common version of the recommendations for submission to the *Shura* and *Nuwab* Councils.

Result 2: Political Society leaders established consultative relationships among their societies and themselves

Indicators:

- Senior political society leaders met for the first time to discuss their societies' political positions on matters of national importance;
- They agreed to continue meetings to foster communication and coordination;
- They established a steering committee to prepare for a national conference; and
- Boycotting societies, including *Al Wefaq*, are for the first time to participating in dialogue on the constitution and studying the possibility of establishing a timeframe in which constitutional reforms would take place.

Result 3: Political Society leaders, media representatives and Nuwab and Shura Council members came together to discuss legislative independence

Indicators:

- They defined the terms and intent of Article 92/A regarding legislative drafting authority; and
- They debated proposals for the establishment of an independent drafting body and constitutional amendments.

Result 4: Bahraini political leaders participated in the establishment of a regional network to strengthen parliamentary practice:

Indicators:

- Parliamentarians from Bahrain shared best practices with and learned from parliamentarians from Yemen and Kuwait; and
- They established a cooperative association with their colleagues in Yemen and Kuwait to promote transparency and accountability in the Persian Gulf region.

V. EVALUATION

The NDI-BTS roundtable on election law reform contributed positively to the development of skills for conveying the importance of this issue and negotiating the terms under which it might be pursued. Although there is a tendency for some political society leaders to digress and focus on the constitutional grievances and past election boycott, there is a growing realization that other issues are more important to future democracy and are a priority for negotiations. Political society leaders who understood the need for negotiating these more important issues asked good questions, participated fully in discussions, and better developed their skills for conveying and negotiating these issues.

If, as expected, Bahrain passes a political party law in the next few months, the transition from society to party will be a challenge for some of these societies. The difference between a society and a party in Bahrain is more than just one of wording. Most of these societies see themselves as both civic groups and political parties. Some see themselves as charitable organizations as well. Although the societies will likely resist the notion, many societies will need to become sleeker, more politically focused organizations to succeed as political parties.

It was clear during the NDI-BTS roundtable that there are strong feelings concerning the participation of military and security personnel in elections. There is an obvious resentment of individuals who have only recently acquired citizenship in Bahrain. In fact, some leaders of political societies could be considered xenophobic. NDI is considering providing additional skill building in political pluralism, emphasizing the practical aspects of how the principle of inclusiveness can facilitate electoral success. A component of this skill building would include basic education on the human rights aspects of suffrage and democracy and include exposure to international human rights documents protecting foreigners, particularly in regard to the rights of migrant workers.

The roundtable discussions on Article 92/A of the constitution and *Shura* council membership and authority provided participants opportunities to discuss constitutional matters substantively. For the first time in three years, boycotters agreed to sit, listen and attempt to persuade members of the *Shura* and *Nuwab* councils and political societies who accept the amended constitution.

In this quarter, NDI's role in Bahrain was challenged by Sheikh Isa Qassim during his sermon on June 17. According to a translation provided by the U.S. Embassy in Manama, the Sheikh accused NDI's work of being "harmful to the government" and NDI itself of being "an enemy of religion" and the people of Bahrain. These statements raised understandable concerns for the position of NDI in Bahrain and in other predominantly Muslim countries in which the Institute works. In a letter responding to Sheikh Isa Qassim, Senior Associate and Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa Leslie Campbell emphasized that NDI was invited to work in Bahrain by political societies and the Royal Court and has worked equally with all societies. Further, NDI takes no position on internal policy issues and firmly believes that Bahrain has engaged successfully on its own path toward democracy. The letter concluded by asking the Sheikh to consider clarifying his statements.

NDI's Senior Program Manager in Bahrain has met with Sheikh Isa Qassim and other religious leaders in Bahrain to express NDI's concerns and resolve this issue. Four prominent religious leaders in Bahrain, including Sheikh Ali Salman, expressed their support for NDI and conveyed that support to their followers. Sheikh Isa Qassim responded to the Institute by saying that his sermon had been misinterpreted and the last paragraph of his speech did not refer to NDI: he was simply making a general statement about the intention of foreigners and their cultural invasions. In a later sermon, Sheikh Isa Qassim attempted to clarify his meaning in an indirect fashion by emphasizing that he did not espouse violence toward any group. Further, Sheikh Ali Salman, in an interview in *Al Wasat* newspaper, conveyed Sheikh Isa Qassim's comments that NDI is not included in the portion of the sermon regarding foreigners being an enemy of religion.

The Sheikh assured NDI that he did not mean to harm any living soul. He further expressed his belief that the American administration does not honestly care about democracy and human rights, but only its own national interest, distinguishing between the American government and its citizens whom he described as honest, hard-working, God-fearing people. He subsequently revised his published sermon by inserting the heading "Internal reform" above the paragraph in which he was referring to foreigners as the enemy of religion to separate it from the paragraph in which he criticized NDI. NDI continues to work with Sheikh Isa Qassim and other religious leaders for a full-clarification of his position on the Institute.

Appendix 1

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING GULF REGION PARLIAMENTARY UNION ASSOCIATION

Preamble:

Parliamentarians from Kuwait, Bahrain, and Yemen, attending the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs' "Good Governance Forum Series" in Sana'a, Yemen, resolved to create a regional association of parliamentarians. The objectives of this regional association are to:

- Work cooperatively to advance good governance initiatives;
- Share parliamentary best practices;
- With the utmost integrity, provide ethical and responsible representation to the people of the Gulf Region; and
- Pursue, promote, and strengthen democratic developments which are consistent with Islamic and Arabian principles.

Resolution:

We, the undersigned, commit to work cooperatively to establish a Gulf Region Parliamentary Union Association. The objectives of this association will be to advance democratic governance in accordance with the ethical principles of Islam, and with the highest integrity and respect for the aspirations of Arab peoples.

A steering committee comprised of elected members of houses of representation from Kuwait, Bahrain, and Yemen will be formed to develop the charter which will guide this association. It is agreed that this charter will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Association membership shall be comprised of democratically elected representatives from the Gulf Region;
- The association will serve to foster cooperation between members of parliaments and houses of representation;
- The association will promote integrity, and members will be bound by a code of ethical conduct;
- The association will only be supported by parliaments, houses of representation, parliamentarians, and parliamentary associations; and
- The association will pursue, promote and strengthen democratic developments which are consistent with Islamic and Arabian principles.